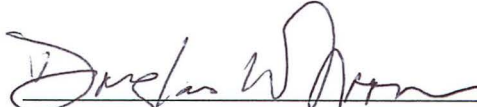


THE PRACTICE OF TEACHERS READING ALOUD IN THE CLASSROOM

By


John C. Bost

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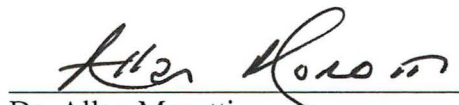

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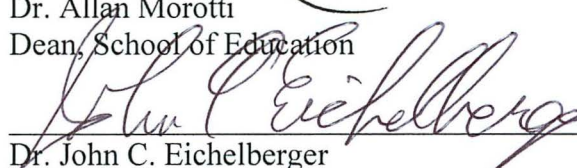

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THE PRACTICE OF TEACHERS READING ALOUD IN THE CLASSROOM

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

By

John C. Bost

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Abstract

This inquiry, which involved use of a teacher survey and classroom observations, was designed to explore how teachers use the practice of reading aloud. This small case study, of one urban elementary school in Alaska, also set out to examine how teachers view the practice of a read-aloud. Studies have identified a number of effective components of a read-aloud. This study found teachers in agreement on some important reasons to read aloud and the components of a read-aloud that they value. The teachers in my inquiry appear to value reading aloud and they all share similarities in how they use the read-aloud practice. All of the teachers agreed that the three most important reasons to read aloud are: for enjoyment, to expose students to texts that they may not read otherwise, and to promote a love of literature and/or reading. Most of the teachers rated two components in particular as very important: animation and expression, and modeling fluent reading.

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I appreciate the time, expertise, patience, and understanding of Alica Unruh, with the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, who helped me as I worked with the Survey Monkey program. I am also grateful for the advice, insights, and support of Dr. Maureen Hogan, professor with the School of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, who has been helpful to me throughout the process of my research.

I am especially indebted to my parents who shared their love of literature with me and inspired me to share the riches of literature with others. My parents read so many wonderful stories and poems to me, and my siblings, that have enriched my life.

Introduction/Statement of Focus

For the purpose of this inquiry, I examined and explored the practice of elementary school teachers reading aloud to their students. I looked at and studied how teachers use the practice of reading aloud to students by conducting observation in classrooms, administering a survey or questionnaire to teachers, and reviewing current and relevant literature. I also wanted to find out *how* teachers view reading aloud to students in their classroom.

I found that the teachers in my small case study seem to value the practice of reading aloud, and most share some common characteristics in how they use the practice of reading aloud. All of the respondents in my survey read aloud to their students, and most read aloud at least once a day each week. The teachers agreed that the three most important reasons to read aloud are: for enjoyment, to expose students to texts that they may not read otherwise, and to promote a love of literature and/or reading. The majority of the teachers rated two components of a read-aloud especially as very important. Those components were using animation and expression and modeling fluent reading.

Rationale

As I grew up, I enjoyed being read to at home by my parents and then at school by my teachers. Those are cherished memories for me. Now as a teacher myself, I make an effort to read aloud to my students every day. Many educators agree that it is important and valuable to read aloud to students (Copenhaver, 2001; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Hill, 2001; Moen, 2004; Routman, 2012; and Schneider, 2003). The important reasons to read aloud to students include: increasing students' fluency and comprehension skills, expanding and improving their vocabulary, enriching their background knowledge, giving them a sense of story and genre and text structure, as well as sharing and helping develop a love of literature. Regie Routman (2012), a veteran teacher, asserts that for students "to become proficient readers and writers, they need to hear the rich language of literature, notice author's craft, and relish how a talented author uses words, format, illustrations, and more. Do not give up reading aloud!" (p. 41).

Researchers, as well as educators, have found that reading aloud is important and beneficial (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Dawes, 2007; Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000; Lane & Wright, 2007; and Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Yet, teachers have less time each day to read aloud (Copenhaver, 2001 and Lane & Wright, 2007) and many teachers do not read aloud at all every day to their students (Jacobs, Morrison, & Swinyard, 2000). I sought to explore this issue of how often teachers read aloud to students.

In addition, I wanted to examine *how* teachers read aloud. Several key components of an effective read aloud have been identified (Beck & McKeown, 2001;

Copenhaver, 2001; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Hill, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007; and Moen, 2004). These identified read-aloud components include: previewing and practicing, text selection, text talk, dialogic reading, print referencing, establishing a clear purpose, and modeling fluent and animated reading. I looked at how educators view these ideas and what components they include in their read-alouds.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for my inquiry into the practice of teachers reading aloud is partially based on Louise Rosenblatt's reader response learning theory, with regard to students listening and responding to a book being read aloud. Tompkins (2003) notes, students "create a meaning that makes sense based on the words" they read and that are read to them "and their own background knowledge" (p. 6). The words read aloud come alive as each listener takes them in and brings their own meaning to them in that particular special moment of back and forth exchange between the reader and listener.

Rosenblatt (1938) notes the special meaning that can arise in these read-aloud moments and experiences, in her reader response theory:

The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. (p. 30).

There is a valuable "lived-through relationship with the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 125) that a reader experiences when he or she transacts with the text. A read-aloud can help to enrich this transactional experience. In a 1999 interview, Rosenblatt compared the rich reciprocal nature of two people conversing to the relationship between a reader and

text. She says, “rather than two static entities, each person is being affected in the conversation and what comes next depends on what happened so far. The same thing is going on between the reader and these squiggles on the page. I call my theory the *transactional theory* because I wanted to emphasize this dynamic relationship” (Marinaccio, 1999).

In addition, Rosenblatt noted in a separate interview, that she “welcomed the term transaction, to emphasize that the meaning is being built up through the back-and-forth relationship between reader and text during a reading event” (Karolides, 1999). A reading event, like a read-aloud experience, can have a dynamic and meaningful never to be duplicated back and forth shared exchange between the reader and the listener. This is part of the transactional process.

Morrison & Wlodarczyk (2009), teachers and researchers, note that Rosenblatt “posited that reading is a transactional process” (p. 111). This theory holds that for the reader and listener to make meaning he/she needs to transact with the text and in turn make connections with themselves. In addition, meaning can be acquired through social interaction and exchanges with others, such as peers and a teacher reading aloud. Students listening to a read-aloud can also make meaning by asking and answering questions, making connections to themselves, to other texts, and to the world, as well as tapping into their wealth of prior knowledge.

Students are always gaining more knowledge and information about the world around them. There’s the written world, the world they experience with all their senses, and the imaginary world. It is a widely accepted finding that new information can best be

understood if students start by linking it to their prior knowledge. Jean Piaget referred to this idea of schema theory as a basic part of the foundation of intelligent behavior (McLeod, 2012). This idea has been accepted by many in the educational field, from Herbert Spencer to John Dewey and beyond (Egan, 2003). Keene & Zimmerman (1997) stress the value of students making connections and “to activate schema – to independently and purposefully recall information and experiences relevant to what they were reading” (p. 55).

It has been suggested, however, that starting where a student is (with their prior knowledge and experience) might be both inadequate and restrictive. Instead, it may make more sense to also inquire into what the student can imagine. They can broaden their knowledge by opening up, playing with, and stretching their imaginations. This can be done throughout the process of learning. Egan (2003) writes, “For the curriculum, we need no longer be constrained to tie knowledge to the everyday experience of students, which can be very dreary for them, but can recognize that their imaginations allow much freedom in how they can go about grasping the universe of knowledge” (p. 445). Students’ imaginations can freely come alive when they read or are read to.

The complexities of imagination have been examined, with an exploration of John Dewey’s perspective, to better understand how critical it is to stimulate and engage students’ imaginations (Takaya, 2006). Dewey thought that imagination is an integral part of the process of knowing. He saw it as the third part “of the five-stage process of knowing: perception, memory, imagination, thinking, and intuition; imagination mediates between the realm of sensory, concrete data (perception and memory) and the realm of

thought (thinking and intuition that deals with what is abstract, conceptual, and general)” (Takaya, p. 149). I am taken by Dewey’s idea that “imagination does not necessarily mean fleeing from reality. Imagination as opposed to fancy allows us to be aware of more than usual possibilities” (as paraphrased by Takaya, p. 150). Students can more fully appreciate and understand what they’re learning when they consider many possibilities and when their imaginations are engaged. Rich content or context can be found to inspire and support students’ imaginative engagement, when teachers take the time to carefully and closely examine “what constitutes and engages students’ imaginative lives” (Takaya, p. 161). Dewey notes, “imagination supplements and deepens observation; only when it turns fanciful does it become a substitute for observation” (Dewey, in Sharpe, Simon, & Levine, 1991, p. 245). When teachers read aloud they engage their students’ imagination, observation, and their attention.

Along with the exciting complexities of imagination, schema, and transactional reader response theories, my theoretical framework includes Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky’s sociolinguistic theories, active and social learning with scaffolding. Vygotsky (1978, 1986), and other sociolinguists, view writing and reading as social activities that are reflective of the community and culture in which students live. Having students talk about books they read or that are read to them is a social component that is helpful to bring meaning to the text. It is beneficial to provide the interactional and social frameworks of scaffolding, to ensure that student learning takes place (Bruner, 1978). Teachers help students construct meaning when they use scaffolding to support and assist

students with their ideas, their reading, or in understanding and appreciating text read aloud to them (Tompkins, 2003).

Literature Review

My mother and my father read to me. I am rich in the memories of the many stories and poems that they shared with me. Life-long friendships were formed. Some of my best friends were Winnie the Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore, Owl, Rabbit, and Christopher Robin. There was also a Deep Water Man named Burt Dow, the family of mallard ducks in *Make Way for Ducklings*, the inventive boy in *How to Ooze and Other Ways of Traveling*, and the young boy at play in the Land of Counterpane. These friends are still with me wherever I go. These storybook characters, as well as my parents, have inspired me to examine more closely the practice of reading aloud.

Research has shown that reading aloud to children is an important and enriching ingredient in their life. It has been shown that there are favorable, encouraging, and motivating effects of parents reading aloud to their children (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). The many positive benefits that have been documented about parents reading to their children include an exciting connection that is made between parents and their children and the books that are read aloud (Fox, 2001). This bond sparks an appreciation of literature that kindles a fire that lights the way for developing literacy skills in a young child.

Schoolteachers can build on this foundation that was first begun at home. Reading aloud has long been seen as an important component in the development of successful readers and learners who are interested in reading (Routman, 2003). There is much evidence that teachers reading aloud to their students have many benefits (Lane & Wright, 2007). Teachers have many and increasing demands on their time in a school day

(Copenhaver, 2001). It can be a challenge to find time to read aloud in such a busy day (Delo, 2008). The most commonly noted obstacle to reading aloud is that teachers have limited or little time to do so (Lane & Wright, 2007). Jim Trelease (1989 b) asserts that teachers must, however, make and take the time to read aloud each day. Taking such time, is part of a well-planned approach to reading aloud (Lane & Wright, 2007), that is worth the effort as effective read-alouds are integrated seamlessly into a school day (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008).

The Commission on Reading in *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985), stated, “The single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (p. 23). People continue to cite the significant findings of this report (Delo, 2008; Fisher et al., 2004; Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005; Routman, 2003; and Trelease, 1989). The Commission also found that reading aloud “is a practice that should continue throughout the grades”(p. 51). Reading aloud is a critical factor in the development of literacy skills and literacy appreciation. Engaging in a read-aloud should not be seen as just a time filler (McPherson, 2005), a way to waste time at the end of class, a form of crowd control (Ivey, 2003), an optional activity, or a break from the regular routine of the classroom (Fisher et al., 2004) Hearing a story or a poem read aloud can bring great satisfying and rewarding enjoyment to the listener. A read-aloud is purposeful; it is not just a sharing of words. It does build knowledge needed for success in reading.

Certain methods do appear to enhance and help ensure the effectiveness of read-alouds (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Lane & Wright,

2007; and Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). One study identified seven essential components of an effective and interactive read-aloud (Fisher et al., 2004). Researchers observed and analyzed the read-aloud practices of 25 expert teachers, and then also observed 120 additional teachers. There were seven common components found in the practices of the expert teachers. All of these teachers included each of the following components as part of their read-alouds: 1) careful text selection, 2) preview and practice of the chosen text, 3) clear purpose of the read-aloud recognized and noted, 4) fluent reading modeled, 5) animated and expressive reading modeled, 6) discussion of the text, and 7) connections made to independent reading and/or writing.

When read-aloud time is valued and used purposefully, thoughtfully, and carefully, it can reap many benefits for students. Read-alouds help develop and increase vocabulary (Fisher et al., 2004; Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005; Routman, 2003; Santoro et al., 2008; Shedd & Duke, 2008; and Trelease, 1989 b), comprehension (Delo, 2008; Ivey, 2003; Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005; Santoro et al., 2008; and Trelease, 1989 a&b), and interest in reading (Delo, 2008; Fisher et al., 2004; Ivey, 2003; Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005; Routman, 2003; and Trelease, 1989 a&b). Read-alouds also promote, foster, and stimulate syntactic and semantic literary register development (Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005; and Trelease, 1989 b), linguistic skills (McPherson, 2005), sight word base (Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005), literacy for students at any age (Fisher et al., 2004; and McPherson, 2005), positive attitudes toward books and reading (Delo, 2008; Fisher et al., 2004; Fox, 2001; Ivey, 2003; Lane & Wright, 2007; McPherson, 2005; Routman, 2003; and Trelease, 1989

a&b), and background, general, and cultural knowledge required for eventual success in reading (Delo, 2008; Fisher et al., 2004; McPherson, 2005; Routman, 2003; Santoro et al., 2008; Trelease, 1989 a&b). In short, read-alouds offer many opportunities to encourage, nurture, and advance children's language and literacy development.

Jim Trelease (1989 b), writing in *The Reading Teacher*, points out the many academic benefits of read-alouds. He also notes that the practice and experience of read-alouds can be fun, simple, and cheap. Trelease emphasizes that instructing students how to read is not sufficient or adequate; it is also important to help them to want to read. Being read to can inspire students to take the initiative and pick up a book and read on their own. Read-alouds are a recommended and effective way to acquaint students with the joy of reading (Fisher et al., 2004). Many "influential teachers are not content to simply read; they identify with characters, walk in their shoes, laugh and cry with them, and experience the sheer, unabashed joy of reading" (Turner, Applegate, & Applegate, 2009, p. 254).

Students that share in this joy of reading also experience the engaging and influential act of listening. While children listen to a wonderful story or poem, they are beginning to develop listening comprehension skills. Jim Trelease (1989), in his *Read-Aloud Handbook*, notes, "listening comprehension feeds reading comprehension" (p. 24). Children first learn the meaning of a word "in a relaxed, unstructured way – by *hearing* it first, hearing it used by important people in" (p. 25) their life. Trelease adds, "the listening vocabulary is the reservoir of words that feeds the reading vocabulary pool" (p. 2).

Scales (2008), a former librarian, writes the following:

There are research studies that draw a connection between oral language and reading aloud to learning to read and becoming a lifelong reader. But we don't need research to tell us that readers are born when children first learn to love books. We don't need research to show the bond that is created when adults and children share the love of a good book by reading it aloud together. (p. 64)

I have found that research is helpful in illuminating the many benefits of teachers reading aloud to students, as well as the complexities and demands of an effective read-aloud. I was aware of some of the pluses of read-alouds, like gaining new information, building a wealth of vocabulary, learning about story structure and book organization, stimulating the imagination, and just enjoying a good story read well. There are many more reasons for teachers to read aloud that may not always be immediately thought of or apparent. I was reminded of these in reviewing the literature on this topic.

Students need to be told frequently and reminded that one of the objectives or purposes of reading and being read to is enjoyment (Fisher et al., 2004). Teachers need to be reminded of this, too. Teachers often feel a school day is filled with meeting and completing a great number of objectives (Scales, 2008). There is evidence that it is important not to forget the value of making time for read-alouds every day.

Methods: Research Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Research Design

My research design was a mixed-methods study, consisting of a survey and observation. In order to help “determine specific characteristics of a group” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 12) of teachers, I chose to use the methodology of a survey. The survey was conducted through the online program *Survey Monkey*. I wrote a short survey of questions (see Appendix A), about the read-aloud practice, for some urban Alaskan kindergarten – sixth grade teachers. When I wrote question 4 of my survey regarding the reasons why teachers read aloud, I considered ideas from a study conducted by Ariail & Albright (2006) about read-aloud practices. The research of Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004) provided me with ideas for question seven, regarding rating components of a read-aloud, in my survey.

This research design also involved observing some of these same teachers while they read aloud to their students. I observed first-through third grade-classrooms. I chose first through third grade classes to concentrate on students’ early development, understanding, and appreciation of (as well as interaction with) the reading experience. While a survey can bring to light attitudes or beliefs of the respondents, it may not be a very reliable approach “to measure people’s actual behavior” (McIntyre, 2005, p. 121). I chose observation to help reveal how teachers put their attitudes and beliefs into their practice.

Data Collection

Collection of survey data. I collected the survey data by first contacting all kindergarten - sixth grade teachers at one particular urban Alaskan school to ask if they would complete a Survey Monkey survey for me. This school was a convenience site, because it is close to where I teach. The teachers were given two weeks to complete my short survey. They were sent a reminder, regarding the survey deadline, one week after receiving the survey. Their responses provided a glimpse or a snapshot of how these teachers view and use the practice of reading aloud in their classrooms.

Fall 2012 pilot survey. In late fall 2012 I piloted this survey instrument. I contacted six primary grade (first through third grades) teachers, in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, to ask if they would be willing to complete a survey for me. This was purposeful, or nonrandom sampling, because I knew these teachers and that they read aloud to their students. Five of the six teachers agreed to take my survey. The teachers were given about a week to complete my short survey. All five teachers responded to my survey about reading aloud. Their responses provided a glimpse or a snapshot of how some teachers view and use read-alouds in their classrooms.

This small sampling of teachers completed a survey I created with the *Survey Monkey* program. I studied a *Survey Monkey Smart Survey Design* guide and also consulted Alica Unruh of the Fairbanks School District who is familiar with survey design.

In designing and composing my survey, I tried to make the questions clear and unambiguous. I decided not to use one of my original questions, for example, because it

seemed like a loaded question. I had thought of asking teachers if they had time to read aloud as often as they'd like. In addition, I was set to ask them to briefly explain why they had time or why not. I was concerned that it might seem like I thought they might not have as much time to read aloud as they'd like, and that that could reveal a bias or perspective of mine. In revising my survey, I think I came up with very straightforward and clear questions.

I am hopeful that my respondents answered the questions candidly and thoughtfully. My survey promised anonymity, which may have helped them to be honest in their responses. It also was a short survey dealing with a topic likely to be of interest to them as educators. Though it can be challenging to get an adequate number of surveys completed and returned in order to make meaningful analyses, I did get all five surveys filled out and returned. This small sampling of five teachers was not intended to help me make some broad generalizations, but instead to help reveal what is happening in a few classrooms in one town as part of a small case study.

All five teachers read aloud to their students at least once a day, between ten and thirty minutes each time. Three of the five, or 60%, devote about fifteen to twenty minutes to each read aloud. In addition, they all read a mix of both fiction and non-fiction to their students. Sixty percent of the teachers mostly read both picture books and chapter books. Two of the five, or 40%, read aloud mostly picture books.

As to the most important reason that these teachers read aloud to their students, they all agreed that it was to promote a love of literature and/or reading. Three of the five teachers were also in agreement on four other important reasons to read aloud. These

reasons were: 1) for their enjoyment, 2) to enhance understanding/comprehension, 3) to improve listening skills, and 4) to increase/improve vocabulary. Two teachers noted that exposing students to texts they might not read otherwise was important. Seeing that reading aloud is important to reinforce/emphasize content was chosen by one teacher, as was the idea of modeling expression. One teacher also added that reading from a popular beginning level chapter book series, which students may not discover on their own, was valuable.

These teachers also rated the value or importance of seven different components of a read-aloud. All were in agreement that modeling fluent reading, as well as using animation and expression, are *very important* elements in a read-aloud. Four of the five, or 80%, rated three traits as *very important*. These three traits are: 1) text selection, 2) establishing a clear purpose for each read-aloud, and 3) connecting the read-aloud to student reading and/or writing. Two components of a read-aloud were rated either *fairly important* or *very important*, the top two of five on the rating scale, by eighty percent of the respondents. These two identified components are: 1) a teacher previewing and practicing the text and 2) discussing the text before, during, and after the read-aloud. One out of the five teachers rated previewing and practicing the text as not important, the lowest spot on the rating scale.

When asked to name three of their top rated or favorite read-aloud books, these teachers were not in agreement on any titles. They all chose at least three titles, that included *Charlotte's Web*, *Goodnight Moon*, *Because of Winn Dixie*, *Go Dog Go*, and *A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams*. The genres in the teachers'

highlighted titles included poetry, fantasy, humor, fiction, legends, non-fiction, picture books, and chapter books.

To learn more about these genres and other aspects of reading aloud, all five of the teachers responding to my survey agreed that they would attend a school district professional development session on this topic. These teachers seem to have an interest in reading aloud, as well as share a few common attitudes or beliefs about the practice of reading aloud. A couple of beliefs stood out. All of these educators see promoting a love of literature and/or reading as one of the most important reasons to read aloud. There also is agreement among these respondents that it is very important for a teacher to model and use fluent, animated, and expressive reading. These seem to go hand in hand, for if lively fluent reading is modeled then promotion of a love of reading and literature may follow.

Collection of observation and survey data. In addition to my fall 2013 survey, I conducted unobtrusive or nonparticipant observation of first through third grade classrooms at this school during their read-aloud time in the fall of this year. I recorded my observations, thoughts, and reflections after each visit to one of these classrooms. My notes were recorded using a note taking form (see Appendix B) that I created. The observations took place when it was convenient for the teachers, and in conjunction with when I could use some personal leave from my teaching schedule.

Data Analysis

The *Survey Monkey* program created a table of survey responses that I could then analyze. This program calculated the number of teachers that responded in a particular way. I can then display this quantitative data in a graph, chart, and/or written description.

These findings are mostly presented as simple, descriptive statistics in my narrative analysis of the data. I also had a small number of qualitative data, in the form of written responses, which I could group into categories and/or quote (Driscoll, 2011). The only demographic information I collected was to find out what grade each respondent teaches, so that I could compare and contrast different grade-level responses.

It can be challenging to get enough surveys completed and returned in order to make meaningful analyses (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). I was confident that with a short survey and a small population of teachers that I am familiar with, that I would get most if not all of the surveys returned. Then the survey results were mostly used in a qualitative approach to help describe some teachers' beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and views about the practice of reading aloud to students. Looking at these descriptions, I tried to see if any patterns emerged, as well.

I also looked for patterns or themes that emerged in my observations of classroom read-alouds. Descriptions of my observations were collected in a notebook and later transferred into my writing. These notes included behaviors I saw, descriptions of the classroom scene, and overall conclusions I drew from what I observed. I tried to make it clear what my actual observations were as opposed to my interpretations or thoughts of those observations (Driscoll, 2011).

Carefully looking through my observational data, I searched for words, phrases, patterns, and regularities that might become headings for coding categories in my data. Such coding categories could help me to sort and organize the collected data. This is an important part of data analysis. My research questions helped to create particular

categories. Certain theoretical approaches, such as components of a read-aloud that have been identified as effective, helped produce coding categories, as well. Organizing the data by coding schemes can and did help facilitate putting the observations in some order for the process of analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

A number of coding categories are suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (2007). They don't intend their list of categories to encompass all the possibilities. Some of their suggestions seemed appropriate for my research. These codes include setting/context, activity, strategy codes, relationship and social structure codes, and narrative codes. The setting code may help sort general information about the observed setting. Activity codes are "regularly occurring kinds of behavior" (p. 176). Strategies people employ to accomplish different things can be coded. Observed "patterns of behavior among people" (p. 177) can point out relationship and social structure. Descriptions of "the structure of talk itself" (p. 178) can generate narrative codes that may be especially pertinent in the practice of a read-aloud. Collecting and sorting observational data through coded categories, emergent themes, content analysis, and the "reporting of frequencies" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 453) are seen as the common preferences for analysis of qualitative data. I considered these when I analyzed my data.

The survey highlighted some beliefs of the teacher respondents toward reading aloud to their students. I chose the observation method to help reveal how teachers put their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about reading aloud into practice. I conducted unobtrusive or nonparticipant observations of four first through third grade classrooms at one school during each teacher's respective read-aloud time. Rather than participating in

the activities I observed, I was just carefully watching from the sidelines (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). I recorded my observations, thoughts, and reflections after each visit to one of these classrooms. My notes were recorded using a note taking form (see Appendix B) that I created. The observations took place when it was convenient for each teacher, and in conjunction with when I could use some personal leave from my teaching schedule to conduct the observations.

My notes included my actual objective observations, which of nine read-aloud components (as listed in my survey, see Appendix A) were evident, and thoughts, reflections, and questions I had afterwards. Carefully reviewing these notes, I looked for any patterns or themes that may have emerged in my observations of classroom read-alouds. I combed through my observational data for words, phrases, behaviors, and regularities that might become headings for coding categories in my data. Such coding categories helped me to sort and organize, as well as later analyze, the collected data. Certain theoretical approaches, such as components of a read-aloud that have been identified as effective, also helped produce essential and key-coding categories. Evaluating the data by such coding schemes helped facilitate putting the observations in some order for the process of analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Statement of Bias

Having grown up with parents and teachers that read to me, I have experienced the pleasures and benefits of a read-aloud. During my nearly twenty-six years of teaching I have seen, heard, and read about the many positive benefits of reading aloud. With this in mind, I have a bias toward parents and teachers reading aloud. I tried to not let my survey questions reveal that bias. I did not want to suggest, for example, that I might find certain components of a read-aloud more beneficial than others.

I also considered the possibility that I might experience something called observer bias. Researchers may have certain expectations, thoughts, opinions, and ideas that will bias what they see and hear. People are influenced by prior experiences, which can then affect how they view the world and people in it. I strived to be as objective as possible while conducting observations and to control my biases. One approach I used to avoid bias was to make use of a technique called the double-entry notebook. This type of observation journal separates objective factual observations from judgments, thoughts, and feelings about the facts (Driscoll, 2011). In an effort to elude and diminish bias it is important to initially record “only the details and facts that are observable” (Driscoll, p. 161).

In addition, there are potential problems that could have arisen from a phenomenon known as the observer effect. I made an effort to observe people and situations in an inconspicuous, nonthreatening, unobtrusive, and natural way. It can be difficult, though, to study something or some people and not have some effect on it or them. Those being observed may behave differently than they usually do because of the

presence of the observer. I tried to be aware of and understand the effect I might be having on those I observed, and strived to minimize that impact (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007 and Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Findings and Analysis

The purpose of my inquiry was to examine and explore the practice of elementary school teachers reading aloud to their students. After studying much research on this subject, I concluded that there are many benefits for students that experience literature read aloud to them by their teacher. Knowing this, I wanted to find out how teachers view reading aloud to students in their classroom. I chose a survey to gain this information. Along with learning how teachers view the practice of reading aloud, I wanted to look at and study how teachers use the practice of reading aloud to students by conducting observation in classrooms.

My findings will present what I learned from my research. In surveying and observing teachers at one particular urban Alaskan elementary school, I conducted a kind of small case study. What I present in my findings will only be a small piece of the big picture, a close-up look at part of one school's practice of reading aloud to students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Having read so much about this practice, it did prove to be illuminating and fascinating to see how teachers today view reading aloud and how they put those beliefs into action.

Survey

After contacting my prospective survey participants in the fall of 2013, to explain the purpose of my survey and to invite them to take part in it, I soon emailed the survey to the teachers. It was essentially the same short survey (see Appendix A) of nine questions that I piloted in the fall of 2012, except for the addition of a demographic question to learn what grade level each respondent taught. My survey was designed using

the *Survey Monkey* program, which most teachers have had prior experience with. The teachers were given two weeks to fill out the survey, and later sent a reminder after about a week had gone by.

The focus of the survey mainly was on how often teachers read aloud, what they see as the most important reasons to read aloud, and what are the most essential components of a read aloud. Respondents were asked to answer multiple-choice questions. In one case, though, they rated read-aloud components on a Likert scale, an attitude scale commonly used in educational research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

In designing the survey, I tried to anticipate potential problems and take steps to avoid them. Fraenkel & Wallen (2009) identify three difficulties in survey research. These difficulties include: making sure all questions are clear, eliciting honest and thoughtful answers from participants, and getting an adequate number of surveys completed and returned to be able to make useful and meaningful analyses. My questions were carefully written so as to be clear and understandable. The survey promised anonymity, which may have helped respondents to be candid in their answers. In addition, that the survey dealt with a topic likely to be of interest to the participating educators, would hopefully lead to thoughtful answers, as well. Finally, to get a sufficient number of surveys filled out and returned, I created a short and easy-to-answer survey that I hoped would be of interest, as well. I also provided ample time for respondents to complete the short survey.

Of the 19 kindergarten through sixth grade teachers sent surveys, 13 teachers responded. This was a return rate of 68.4%. Out of the 13 respondents, two seem to also

fall into the category of nonresponse. These two apparently signed in and attempted to take the survey, but their responses do not appear. This could have been due to a glitch in the *Survey Monkey* program or due to other reasons. Fraenkel & Wallen (2009) note that reasons for survey nonresponse can include: unwillingness to be surveyed, forgetfulness, or lack of interest in the subject being surveyed. In addition, Driscoll (2011) points out that email survey requests may be ignored because of the impersonal quality and great volume of emails many people receive.

Nonetheless, having received completed responses from at least one teacher per most grade levels, except third grade, I should have sufficient data to make some meaningful analysis. Having also spoken with people that have more experience than I with survey results and with sample groups of varied sizes, I have concluded that the response rate for my small case study was pretty good.

Fall 2013 survey findings. One hundred percent of the teachers in my case study read aloud to their students, and most read aloud at least once a day each week. The only teachers, of those responding, that read aloud for less than once a day each week were a fifth grade and a sixth grade teacher. For the younger (kindergarten and first grade) students, a shorter period of time is devoted each time to a read-aloud. For these students it is about ten minutes each time. As students get older (in second, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade), teachers read aloud from 15-20 or at least 20-30 minutes each time. This might be due to an increased attention span in older students.

The teachers then identified the most important reasons that they read aloud to their students. The survey gave them eight different reasons to choose from, as well as

space for them to add one or more of their own. There were some varied responses, but all of the teachers agreed on three of the choices as the most important reasons. Those reasons were: for their enjoyment, to expose students to texts they may not read otherwise, and to promote a love of literature and/or reading. Teachers in the primary grades (K-2nd), picked most of the eight reasons as important. Interestingly, teachers in the intermediate grades (4th-6th) were more selective. Four of the five intermediate grade respondents chose only 3 or 4 of the reasons as most important. One sixth grade teacher, though, selected all 8 as most important reasons.

After noting the most important reasons to read aloud, the participating teachers rated the importance of seven different components of a read-aloud. The components were rated on a five-degree Likert scale, from a high of very important to a low of not important. Looking for patterns or commonalities, a few items stood out. All of the teacher respondents in grades K – 5 agreed on one component as very important, and that was *using animation and expression* in their read-aloud. The two 6th grade teachers did both rate using animation and expression as important, just two degrees below very important. Another component that was rated highly was *modeling fluent reading*. Six respondents ranked *modeling fluent reading* as very important, three as fairly important (the second highest ranking), and two as important.

Two other read-aloud components rated highly were *text selection* and *discussing the text before, during, and after the read-aloud*. Five ranked *text selection* as very important, two as fairly important, and four as important. *Discussing the text* is sometimes referred to as text talk in the research on this subject. Text talk was rated as

very important by two respondents, as fairly important by two, as important by six, and slightly important by one person.

Observation findings.

The teachers I observed, who I will refer to as Anne, Sandy, Grace, and Mary, all incorporated most of the components recognized as effective ingredients in a read-aloud. Some of these components were more evident than others, but each teacher tapped into their experience with individual style and personality to produce fluent reading and engaging read-alouds. Looking back at the read-alouds, what emerges is how each teacher chose to mix in the different ingredients, or components, to make the read-aloud their own.

The nine components, identified as effective, that I focused on in my observations made for useful coding categories. Each component acted as an ingredient in the mix of each teacher's read-aloud. It was interesting to observe how the inclusion of the ingredients varied for the different read-alouds. These identified components are: text selection, text previewed and practiced, clear purpose established, fluent reading modeled, animation and expression, text talk, listener engagement, reader's interest in chosen text, and making connections to other reading or writing.

Anne's read-aloud. Anne chose to read a favorite picture book of hers. She let her class know this before beginning to read the book titled *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*. Clearly she had previewed the text and appeared to have practiced it, as well. Prior to reading, Anne noted that the author, Byrd Baylor, set her story in the southwest of the United States. Anne told her students that she had grown up in New

Mexico, and had seen such dust devils as would be referred to early in the story. She asked if any student knew what a dust devil was. One student said it was like a small dust tornado, which Anne said was a good description. Another student said they had seen a dust devil once that so startled them that they nearly fell in some water. This was most of the text related talk before the reading began.

In addition, prior to the start of the reading, the teacher gathered her class at the back of the room on the carpet. She briefly reviewed class rules about helpers cleaning up lunch trash and helping with calendar time. Anne also reminded the students about sitting on the carpet quietly. The class did their daily calendar time activities, with some math practice tied to that day's date.

Soon she was ready to begin reading the story. Anne sat on a low plastic student chair, while the class mostly sat before her in a semicircle on the rug. Some near the back or on the edges of the gathering eventually lay back on the carpet to listen. Anne first mentioned that an award-winning illustrator, Peter Parnell, illustrated the book. She told the class that she would read some, a page or two, and then show the accompanying picture. She asked them to picture in their minds what she read. Anne said that she didn't like reading while showing the picture, because it wasn't comfortable for her.

She read quietly at first, but eventually read a bit louder at times for emphasis. Anne did use some animation and expression, but it was like she was sharing a favorite quiet story. Her expression was dramatic now and then where it seemed needed.

She often leaned in or forward toward her audience as she read. Usually she held the book with one hand while gesturing sometimes with the other. When she stopped to

show each two page spread picture (slowly holding out and moving the book so all could see it), a few students often commented, with thoughts like: “That’s what I imagined.” or “Mine was different.” When she read about a double rainbow, one student said: “I saw a double rainbow once.” Anne replied: “Wow!” Early in her reading, though, she reminded them to put their hands down. She wasn’t going to ask (or take?) any questions. So, some text talk during the story was encouraged and evident, but not a lot. Sometimes she would point out certain things in the picture like a falling star, a dust devil, or the main character writing in a little notebook. At one point, she agreed with the author that if you’d been inside you would have missed it (a wonderful sight outside).

At the end of the story, she asked if the class thought the story’s character was lonely. Most replied together no. Afterwards, she told the class how she’d once (back in about 1966) seen a fireball in the sky. She had wanted to ask or write Byrd Baylor to see if they had both seen the same fireball on the same day. At that time, she said had asked people she knew, and nobody else had seen it.

Anne also told the class that around January she would read the book again to them for an art project. She asked them to start thinking of a celebration they might like to make a picture of and write about. This was helping them to make a connection from the story to themselves and some writing. Then Anne took a few questions or comments, which made for some text talk after the story. One student said how they had once seen a falling star, while another told about a rainbow they had seen. She said they might like their art project to show that memory.

Soon it was to be show and tell time. First they stood up, spread out, and did some “Simon says” stretches. They wiggled about a bit and stretched, after having listened to a story that most seemed very engaged and interested in. The students were mostly quiet during the reading, but appeared attentive and curious about the story. Anne’s expressive and fluent reading seemed to draw the class in. They would lean in toward the teacher, look eagerly at the pictures, and once in awhile call out comments about what they saw or heard.

Anne seemed intent on sharing a favorite story of hers with the students. She had a relaxed manner as she read, and she tried to spark students’ curiosity and imagination during the reading. It was clear that she was also trying to help students make some personal connections with the story, as well. She didn’t appear, though, to want too much talk or interruptions while she read. Her students seemed to respond favorably to her approach to reading and the story itself. When given a chance, the students were full of comments and thoughts to relate to each other about the story.

Sandy’s read-aloud. About a week following my visit to Anne’s classroom, I observed in Sandy’s classroom. This observation also occurred in the early afternoon and not long after lunch time. After cleaning up from lunch, students pretty soon went to the back of the classroom and started finding a place for story time. Some sat on the floor, some sat on or leaned against a pillow or cushion, a few sat on a small couch, about three stood behind the couch, one stood to the side of the couch, a few were lying down on their tummies, and maybe one sat on a chair next to the couch. Sandy sat down before them on a chair. Pretty soon after they were mostly settled in and down, she announced:

“Our first story today is *The Big Hungry Bear* (title read in a very dramatic voice). She was then briefly delayed, interrupted from starting by a student question, but very soon she began reading.

Showing the cover of the picture book, Sandy asked (by a show of hands) if any had heard the story before. A few hands went up. The author and illustrator were mentioned. Soon she began reading aloud with the book opened to show each two-page picture spread while she read. She held the book up off to her side for all to see, as she read. Sandy varied her voice expression and animation in a lively manner to match parts of the story. She clearly seemed to be having fun reading this tale.

Sandy noted how much she liked the illustrations. At one point, she said “Look what the illustrator did here.” She would ask short questions off and on during the story about illustrations or events in the story and would sometimes get response and sometimes not too much. At one point she asked about an expression in the story: “Hungry feet? What does that make you think?” She got a few responses and then she guided them toward what she thought it meant. Sandy asked a variety of questions sprinkled briefly throughout (seemingly not always expecting a response) and made a few observations. In this way, she seemed to be encouraging, allowing, and trying to prompt some text talk during the story. Students were leaning in, paying attention, making comments or sharing thoughts, and laughing at funny parts.

After the reading *The Big Hungry Bear*, Sandy asked what her class thought of the story with a show of thumbs up, thumbs down, or halfway between up and down. After kids voted, she asked why some liked it and why some didn’t. Some found it crazy,

funny, or said how much they liked the illustrations. This provided some time for a bit of text talk after the story. To one student that had a problem with the story, she offered him a challenge to rewrite the tale with a different ending.

Soon afterwards, she held up a chapter book, *The Chocolate Touch*, which she was ready to return to reading from. She told the class to “go ahead and get comfortable”. After they settled in to a spot, Sandy counted back 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Then she briefly reviewed part of the story from when she had previously read. Someone had had a solo in the last read section of the story. Sandy asked what a solo was. After briefly talking about that word and how things were not going so well for a main character, she said “Here we go ...” and started reading again from this chapter book.

She didn’t mention the book’s title, seemingly because they knew what story it was. She held the book by both hands and initially was mostly leaning forward and reading. Later she sat back. Sandy made a lot of eye contact with her class and read in a very animated way. The teacher was clearly having a good time reading and sharing this story, as much as she had with the picture book. She smiled, laughed once in awhile, leaned in to her audience in an engaging manner, and used dramatic or even melodramatic expression in her voice.

A few times Sandy made a comment or asked something like “What do you think of that?” The class was much quieter, though, during the chapter book reading than during the picture book. At one point she reminded a student to keep “hands to self” and once asked a child to move to a different spot to listen (because he was being somewhat

disruptive), but the class was mostly well behaved and attentive during this and the previous story.

After she finished reading a chapter, Sandy briefly asked what the class predicted the next chapter (that would be heard tomorrow) would be about. She got a few responses. This provided for a little text talk after the reading.

As in Anne's class, the students in Sandy's class got up for a short stretch break after the story. They rose from having just listened to two stories read in a very lively and fluent voice. As they sat comfortably in different spots and positions, they appeared quite engaged, involved, and interested in both stories. Sandy kept the pace of her reading going at a steady enough and animated fashion that potential disruptions, disinterest, and lulls were prevented.

Sandy exhibited great upbeat energy and positive enthusiasm, during both her picture book and chapter book reading. She clearly seemed to be having a good time while she read, and her pleasure with the readings was catching. The students were quite drawn into her read-alouds from the start and continued to maintain that engagement. There was a lot of conversation flowing back and forth during the stories, though mostly during the picture book tale. Sandy's personality and style kept the students thinking, imagining, and wondering.

Both Sandy and Anne had some similarities in their read-aloud time, as well as a few differences. They both gathered students at the back of the rooms to join everyone to hear a picture book story. Each teacher displayed great animation, expression, fluency, and genuine interest in their respective story. Since Anne's story was a poetic narrative

about celebrating some of the unique sensory wonders outdoors, her animation and delivery was somewhat quiet and sedated at times. This was reflective of the mood of her story. Anne's listeners did seem drawn to and fascinated by the wonders shared in her story. Sandy's students were treated to a slightly livelier reading, which again matched the mood her tale. Hers was a more comical and sometimes larger than life fanciful story. Sandy encouraged more talk about the story from students before, during, and after the read-aloud. This provided an invigorating exchange of questions, comments, reactions, and ideas, which seemed to help enhance and not detract from the flow of the reading. Anne, again possibly to reflect the quiet excitement in her story's celebrations of nature, encouraged student text talk mostly before and after the reading. There was some text talk sprinkled about during the story, too, though.

Grace's read-aloud. About a month after my observation in Sandy's classroom, I visited with Grace's class. It was also in the early afternoon. The students did not gather on the carpet this time, though, for the read-aloud. When I entered the room, most of the class was seated at their desks. Grace was directing some students to take their turn to get paper for coloring or drawing. They were seated in three rows, with pairs of desks facing each other. Most had paper, crayons, markers, and templates to draw and color with. Some had coloring book pages, some plain paper, and a few were coloring bookmarks. Two or three were working on computers at a back corner of the room.

Once all were seated, Grace soon started reading from a chapter book titled *The Cricket in Times Square*. She asked, "Yesterday ... remember what happened?" Then a few voices quickly shared a highlight or two from the previous day's reading. This brief

review allowed for a little text talk before the reading. Not long afterwards, Grace said, coincidentally as Sandy had said, “Okay, here we go ...” Then she started reading from where she had left off, reading a bit of what had been read the last time.

Unlike Anne and Sandy, Grace did not sit while she read. Instead she stood and slowly walked around the room as she read. The students seemed used to or comfortable with this approach, because very few looked up when Grace walked by or stopped to read nearby. She did have to stop reading several times to remind students that it wasn’t a sharing or talking time. One of the first times she paused, she said how often she ends up losing her place in the story when she has to stop. More than once she reminded them it “wasn’t really an interactive time”. Grace evidently meant for students not to be interacting or visiting with each other during the reading. At one point, Grace said, “This is a quiet coloring or drawing time.” She was letting her class color or draw, but not wanting them to be drawn into social visiting while listening to the read-aloud.

As she read, Grace stopped a few times to ask a brief question about something in the story, often to clarify a possibly unusual or unknown word or phrase. For example, she asked if anyone knew what a brook was, a long hair, liverwurst, or why a character’s heart might be hurting. A student called out that the character could be scared. Scared? Yes, Grace responded, he’s used to the country, not the city. She also asked if the class remembered where a character was in the story. Many called out correctly, “New York!” She also asked them to raise their hand if they remembered who Maria (in the story) was. A number of students raise their hands to respond. These were some ways that Grace

involved her class with the story while she read, checking for understanding and providing opportunities for some text talk.

About midway in the reading, Grace asked if the students could moan, to mimic a character in the story. Many then moaned together. They seemed to enjoy that. She had to say to one, though, that they were not asked to define their moan. That student had said something, after moaning, about why he was moaning. At another point, early on in the reading, the Grace stopped by a student and quietly inquired, “What are you doing?” She soon added, “Not a good choice.” She also stopped at least once to ask a couple of students on computers at the back of the room, “Can you whisper back here.” She reminded some that they were not to be sharing markers, and that this was supposed to be a quiet listening time.

Roughly twenty minutes into the reading, Grace walked around to show everyone a picture from the story. A bit after that, she said, “I want to find out what happens next (in the story) before we go to music class.” After reading some more, she said, “Computer people, you have two minutes.”

In closing, Grace said, “We’ll see what happens next time.” Most of her class had been pretty quiet, as they listened and drew or colored pictures at their desks. They appeared to be able to multi-task. They listened to an expressive and fluent voice, trying to pull them into the tale. A number of students, though, had appeared very taken with their drawing, coloring, and/or their peers sitting nearby. This made it a bit hard to tell how consistently engaged and interested they were in the reading and the story. The students did not look toward the teacher much during the reading. A very few did speak

to each other once in a while, and got up to share or borrow crayons or markers. The class seemed pretty respectful and used to the read-aloud routine procedures. Overall, there were not too many little side conversations. Two or three, working on computers during the story, could be heard talking to each other a time or two. The class was eager to see a picture from the book, some craning their necks to look as Grace walked around the room to show the illustration. Many students were aware of and able to call out certain facts about the story when asked during the reading, and were quick to share a thought or comment in response to a query from their teacher.

Grace shared her reading of an excerpt from *A Cricket in Times Square* in a calm and fairly even delivery. It was almost as if she was telling a story sometimes, rather than reading it. She walked around as she read, giving the student listeners a closer proximity to the storyteller. Given that the class was allowed to draw, color, or work on a computer while Grace read, the students were not as consistently engaged with the story as they might otherwise have been. A number of students appeared a bit distracted by other things and/or their peers. Despite distractions, many students appeared knowledgeable and interested in the story when Grace called upon them or they spoke up on their own.

Like Sandy and Anne, Grace modeled great expression and fluency in her read-aloud. Grace encouraged some text talk, as well, like the other two teachers. The talk mostly occurred during Grace's story, and often to check for understanding with her listeners. She wanted to help clarify certain words and expressions and get a sense of how well they were listening and comprehending. This talk could help the students better appreciate and picture the action in this chapter book tale. Grace's book had very few

illustrations, unlike Sandy's and Anne's, which the students needed to be close by to see. So instead of gathering near the teacher on the rug, Grace's listeners busied themselves drawing and coloring at their desks while taking in and enjoying a return to an ongoing chapter book story that Grace read while she slowly strolled around the room.

Mary's read-aloud. About a week later, I observed Mary's classroom. It was early afternoon again, and the class had recently come inside from recess. As in Grace's class, most of Mary's students sat at their desks during the read-aloud. This may have been because she just read, again like Grace, from a chapter book with few pictures to display. After students put away their outdoor recess clothes, most pretty quickly found materials to draw and color with or a few got some Play-Doh to play with. Most sat at their desks, either on chairs or on big yoga balls, though some sat at other spots in the room. All sat in some type of a chair, though, rather than on the carpeted floor. Mary soon sat on an adult size plastic school chair near the front of the room, but also quite near the class.

Mary sat the whole time, while she read aloud, mostly holding the book, titled *Swindle*, and looking at it as she read. She did look up once in awhile. Before beginning her reading, she asked who remembered where she had left off and what was happening last time she read. A few voices called out with answers. This gave the class the opportunity for a little text talk prior to the return the read-aloud.

As Mary read, several times she briefly paused to ask a few story related questions. She asked about words or phrases in the story, to see if the class was familiar with them. For example, Mary asked who knew what a nightstand was or a kitchen utility

drawer. Some thought utility drawers stored silverware or utensils. When Mary explained that such a drawer is more like a junk drawer that seemed to help their understanding. She also asked what was meant by “the touch of a surgeon” and who was Luther (in the story). Several students quickly called out that Luther was a dog. Mary also wondered if the class knew what was meant by the phrase “she played with her flashlight”. These instances provided students a chance to participate in some text talk during the reading of the story.

At one point, Mary asked for students to predict what would happen next in the story. A few called out ideas and then Mary read more of the tale, to see what would happen next. She finished the excerpt in about fifteen minutes, reading to the end of a chapter. She then hinted at how the next chapter would begin.

Afterwards, she said she had a short pop quiz about a recently read part of the story. All sat at their desks, and readied to answer the three comprehension questions on paper. The questions were written, but she read them aloud. The questions were the following:

- 1) Where did they find Griffin’s baseball card in Palomino’s house?
- 2) What did Savannah find in the room downstairs that scared her?
- 3) What was Griffin using to break into the safe?

Soon they were done, and Mary collected the papers and started to move onto another lesson or activity.

Most of the class had just been involved in the activities of drawing or messing about with Play-Doh. This made it tricky to tell how engaged and interested the listeners

were in the reading. Nonetheless, the teacher often called out some quick and short questions during the reading to check their understanding, listening comprehension, or recall. Many students appeared to eagerly and fairly quickly respond and answer the various questions. One boy sat close to Mary, not drawing or playing with Play-Doh, seemingly quite engaged as he looked at her. A girl, also sitting nearby the teacher, stopped once in awhile to look at and listen to the teacher reading.

Many students did appear interested in the text, because they were not talking to or distracting each other. Most were drawing or toying with Playdoh, but they often spoke up about the story without looking up. This helped me surmise they were more interested in and engaged than I might have thought. At least one student called out, near the end of the reading, "Are you going to stop?" The question was asked in a way that sounded like the student did not want Mary to stop.

This student's not wanting the story to stop seemed to embody a quiet and respectful rapport that Mary had with her class. For even though they were drawing or playing, they still were evidently engaged in listening, too. As Mary read in a pretty calm, even keel, and very fluent voice, she did sprinkle in some animation and expression from time to time when needed. The atmosphere in the room had seemed lively at first, as the students came in from recess. They were not overly chatty. Most seemed well versed in getting ready for story time and most did that pretty quickly. Pretty soon they all found a spot in the room and prepared to quietly and politely draw or play and listen.

Mary's class seemed used to the routine of the daily read-aloud story time. They settled down pretty quickly to listen, as they drew a picture or messed about with Play-

Doh. Mary's calm and friendly demeanor appeared to help engage her class as she read. There were a few that got distracted or seemed off task from listening fully, but they seemed in the minority. Maybe knowing that Mary might surprise them with a short pop quiz (as she did), could have helped to keep them on their toes and engaged.

Similar to Anne, Sandy, and Grace, Mary read with terrific expression, interest, and fluency. Mary's class, like Grace's, mostly stayed at their desks listening to the chapter book read-aloud while busying their hands with drawing, as well. Some of Mary's students played with Play-Doh instead. Also like Grace, Mary allowed some text talk mostly during the reading that was predominantly again to help clarify certain unusual words and expressions. She tried to make some personal connections with her listeners while making these clarifications. Mary also provided verbal exchanges to check for understanding of other story elements. In addition to this verbal check, she followed up the read-aloud with a short three-question comprehension quiz.

All four of these women are veteran teachers, having each taught for at least several years. They bring their experience, love of learning and of literature to bear as they take the time each day to read aloud to their students. Each has a different style, manner, and interests that arise as they read, but they all appear to be aiming to make the read-aloud experience an enjoyable one. A teaching day can be very busy and hectic. Young students have many diverse interests, needs, and backgrounds. They also can have very short attention spans. Amid all these factors and occurrences, these four teachers are among many that stop each day to show that they value the experience, benefits, and lively interaction of sharing a read-aloud.

Conclusion/Discussion

The classroom read-alouds I observed, and the teachers I surveyed, helped me begin to better answer my initial research questions. My inquiry sought to look at how teachers use the practice of reading aloud to students, as well as *how* they view this practice. Since I conducted a small case study at one school, it is difficult to make broad generalizations about my findings. Fraenkel & Wallen (2009) point out that “drawing conclusions about a population after studying a sample is never totally satisfactory, since the researchers can never be sure that their sample is perfectly representative of the population” (p. 101).

The sample size of my study being small is then a limitation of my inquiry. Another limitation is that in exploring how teachers view and use read-alouds, I could have also interviewed teachers. I chose not to. Interviewing teachers might have helped to reveal more about teachers’ read-aloud views, opinions, routines, and behaviors. It is true, though, that “people are inherently biased about how they see the world and may report their own actions in a more favorable way than they may actually behave” (Driscoll, 2011, p. 162). So even though teacher interviews might have been illuminating and added more to my small snapshots, they could have given biased and limited perspectives, as well.

Teachers would also need to be willing to be interviewed. I was concerned that since I would not be just a teacher colleague in conversation, and instead a researcher, my interviewing teachers might be awkward or intimidating. The teachers might perceive me as one armed with certain information and knowledge about read-alouds that they were

not privy to. I might thus be seen as judging their answers, opinions, and behaviors. Even if I asked non-evaluative type questions, the interviews still could have been uncomfortable. Teachers could also be worried about the confidentiality, anonymity, and reported accuracy of the views they shared in an interview.

Having not interviewed teachers can still be seen as a limitation of my study. An additional limitation is that I only observed each teacher once during a read-aloud. If I had observed each teacher more often I might have gotten a fuller and more representative take on their read-aloud experience and practice. I did have a limited amount of time, though, to administer my survey and conduct my observations. Since the kind of study I was working on requires a lot of time and energy, I chose to just observe each teacher once.

However, even with the acknowledged limitations of my inquiry, I believe that I can draw some conclusions based on my interpretation of the research results. The research findings begin to reveal what my research questions were seeking to uncover. Further study could lead to broader and more representative generalizations of my targeted population, teachers.

The teachers I surveyed did all appear to agree that reading aloud was a critical part of their teaching day. They were particularly united, in their responses, about three of the most important reasons to read aloud. These teachers noted that it is most important for the read aloud to: 1) provide enjoyment, 2) expose students to texts they might not read otherwise, and 3) to promote a love of literature and/or of reading. All of these

reasons seem to go hand in hand. Teachers can bring enjoyment to their students and foster a love of literature and reading, when they share a variety of texts in a read-aloud.

While it is greatly beneficial for students to develop an interest in and love for learning, it is also helpful for them to acquire an interest in and love for reading. As I pointed out in my literature review, two of the main purposes of reading and being read to are sheer delight and enjoyment (Fisher et al., 2004). Jim Trelease (1989 b) emphasizes that instructing students how to read is not sufficient or adequate; it is also important to help them to want to read. Being read to can inspire students to take the initiative and pick up a book and read on their own. Read-alouds are a recommended and effective way to acquaint students with the joy of reading (Fisher et al., 2004). Scales (2008) contends, “readers are born when children first learn to love books” (p. 64).

To help their students develop a love for books and reading, teachers responding to my survey also seemed to agree on a few of the most effective components of a read-aloud. A majority of the teacher respondents chose one component as very important, and that was *using animation and expression*. Two 6th grade teachers rated *using animation and expression* as important, only two degrees below very important. One other component that was rated highly was *modeling fluent reading*. Six respondents ranked *modeling fluent reading* as very important, three as fairly important (the second highest ranking), and two as important.

Teachers appear to value modeling fluent reading, as well as sharing and modeling their love for reading with their students. Eaton (1913, as cited in Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004, p. 12) notes that some people fail to understand that “literature is

addressed to the mind through the ear, ... and that since this is so, the ear must be appealed to if the student is to understand literature aright, or to appreciate at all the sensuous beauty which is latent in it". By combining lively, animated, and expressive reading with good fluent reading, teachers create a more engaging read-aloud for students' ears and imagination. As noted in my literature review, many "influential teachers are not content to simply read; they identify with characters, walk in their shoes, laugh and cry with them, and experience the sheer, unabashed joy of reading" (Turner, Applegate, & Applegate, 2009, p. 254).

In addition, two other read-aloud components were rated highly in my survey. One was *text selection*. Most of the teacher respondents rated *text selection* very highly on my survey's Likert scale. Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004) found that teachers recognized as experts in the practice of reading aloud select "text based on the interests and needs of the students" (p. 11). These teachers make it a habit to consistently select "high quality children's literature for their read-alouds. Often these were award winning books" (Fisher, et al., 2004 p. 11). I have discovered, from my own experience, what a difference careful text selection makes. Students' interests and needs can vary greatly when it comes to a read-aloud text they find engaging and can make connections with.

The other component that teachers rated highly in my survey, *discussing the text before, during, and after the read-aloud*, can assist students in making more connections with the text and the reading. Fisher, et al. (2004) found that "expert teachers consistently demonstrated ... the strategic use of book discussions ... before, during, and after the read-aloud. The expert teachers ... used a balance of efferent and aesthetic questions

during their read-alouds” (Fisher, et al., p. 13). Such discussions can enable students to share their predictions, thoughts, reflections, concerns, expectations, and reactions about the read-aloud (Fisher, et al.).

My observations of read-alouds provided me with examples of different ways that teachers incorporate discussion with a read-aloud. I saw teachers using some *effere*nt and *aesthetic* questions for discussion purposes. Using *effere*nt questions focused on what information the students would carry or take away from the reading, whereas *aesthetic* questions dealt more with connections being made during the reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). By trying to make use of both of these types of questions, it seemed to show that “they wanted their students to understand the information and details presented in the text (*effere*nt). They also wanted their students to engage with the text and make connections between the text and their own lives (*aesthetic*)” (Fisher, et al., 2004, p. 13). In my observations, I saw teachers facilitating discussions about unusual words, ideas, phrases, and expressions. They talked about dust devils, hungry feet, solos, utility drawers, the touch of a surgeon, liverwurst, how a person played with her flashlight, and why a heart might be hurting. Students also talked about and reacted to illustrations. Many of the students recalled and predicted events, as well. Some shared ideas, personal memories, and stories related to the read-aloud texts.

The teachers I observed appeared to clearly be trying to relate to each read-aloud, too. They talked about things like their interest in the author, the illustrations, the setting, the humor, the surprises, and how they had experience with different events, ideas, or words. Sharing some of their connections to and interest in the texts seemed to help draw

in the listeners a bit more. There was also some evident give and take, between teachers and students, engaged in these discussions.

The discussions, seen and heard in my observations, were one way that I witnessed how the teachers were practicing what many appeared to value. The values I refer to are the ones most highly rated in my survey of teachers. In addition to providing opportunities for discussion, another effective component very evident was good animated, expressive, and fluent reading. Some were livelier or more outgoing in their animation and expression. Each however, brought their own style, personality, and interests to their readings. Most students I observed seemed engaged in the read-alouds; however, it was tricky sometimes to tell how engaged those students were that were also drawing or playing with Play-Doh.

The students I observed were given lots of opportunities to play with their imaginations, as well, as they listened to and interacted with the readings. As noted in my theoretical framework, John Dewey (as paraphrased by Takaya, 2006, p. 150) had the idea that “imagination does not necessarily mean fleeing from reality. Imagination as opposed to fancy allows us to be aware of more than usual possibilities”. Rich content or context can be found to inspire and support students’ imaginative engagement, when teachers take the time to carefully and closely examine “what constitutes and engages students’ imaginative lives” (Takaya, p. 161). When teachers read aloud they engage their students’ imagination, their attention, and help them to more fully appreciate and understand what they’re learning.

The teachers I observed appeared to be trying to help their students fully appreciate the read-alouds, by purposefully incorporating the most important reasons (as they identified in my survey) for a read-aloud in their practice. These teachers seemed to clearly be aiming for the read-aloud experience to be enjoyable and to be a chance to promote a love of literature and reading. They were doing this, in part, by sharing texts that students might not read otherwise. The teachers' enthusiasm, animation, and enjoyment seemed to be spreading throughout their audience, the eager and engaged students. The audience of students displayed engagement in ways that included leaning in toward the reader, laughing at funny pictures or parts of a story, spontaneously calling out comments and observations, verbally making connections between the story and themselves, and quickly responding to queries by the teacher.

Further research on this topic of reading aloud in the classroom, could lead to more broad generalizations and conclusive findings. Nonetheless, I was pleased to learn what I did from my small case study. It was good to find that kindergarten through sixth grade teachers value read-aloud time, enjoy it, and work to include it often, or most every day, in their instructional plans. Some studies have shown that only a small number of teachers above first grade make time to read aloud to their students each day (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). I am curious about how conclusive or representative those research findings are. I suspect that, like the teachers in my inquiry, more teachers throughout elementary schools make time to read aloud nearly every day to their students.

Teachers, reading aloud to their students, were the focus of my study. I was curious about how teachers viewed read-alouds and how they used the practice. Further

inquiry could delve deeper into my topic and/or branch off into other related topics. It would be interesting to see the results of a greater sampling of elementary school teachers surveyed, as well as observed. This could provide some more broad generalizations and conclusive findings. Others might look at secondary teachers, too. Then some might branch off to explore more of the students' perspective on and involvement in read-alouds. How do students view read-alouds? How much are students engaged in a read-aloud? Examining more closely the variety and types of text talk before, during, and after read-alouds would also make for some exciting and revealing further study. Hopefully people will continue to explore and share the wonderful joys and pleasures of a read-aloud.

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Appendix A

Reading Survey

The following is the text of my *Survey Monkey* survey:

Reading Survey

Introduction: Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey for my University of Alaska Master's thesis. Your feedback is important to me. This should only take about 5 (or less) minutes of your time. Your answers will be completely anonymous.

In order to navigate through this survey, please use the following navigation links:

Click the Next >> button to continue to the next page

Click the Previous >> button to return to the previous page

Click the submit >> button to submit your survey

1) What grade do you teach?

- a. Kindergarten
- b. First grade
- c. Second grade
- d. Third grade
- e. Fourth
- f. Fifth
- g. Sixth

- 2) About how often do you read aloud to your students?
 - a. Once a day
 - b. Twice a day
 - c. Once a week
 - d. Several times a week
- 3) About how much time do you devote to each read-aloud?
 - a. 10 minutes
 - b. 15 -20 minutes
 - c. 20-30 minutes
 - d. 30 minutes or more
- 4) What is the most important reason that you read aloud to students?
 - a. For their enjoyment
 - b. To enhance understanding/comprehension
 - c. To expose students to texts they may not read otherwise
 - d. To improve listening skills
 - e. To promote love of literature and/or reading
 - f. To reinforce /emphasize content
 - g. To increase general knowledge
 - h. To increase/improve vocabulary
 - i. Or another reason of your choice {Write your response in text box}
- 5) What type of books do you read aloud mostly?
 - a. Picture books

- b. Chapter books
 - c. A bit of both types
- 6) What genre do you read aloud mostly?
- a. Fiction
 - b. Non-fiction
 - c. A mix of both genre types
- 7) Please rate the importance of the following components of a read-aloud.

Rating scale:

Not Important – Slightly Important – Important – Fairly Important – Very Important

Text selection

Teacher previewing and practicing the text

Establishing a clear purpose for each read-aloud

Modeling fluent reading

Using animation and expression

Discussing the text before, during, and after read-aloud

Connecting the read-aloud to student reading and/or writing

- 8) Please name 3 of your favorite read-aloud titles.

{Write in text box}

9) Would you attend a school district professional development session about reading aloud?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Probably.

Thank you. End of survey.

Thank you again for taking the time to fill out my survey. I appreciate your thoughts and participation.

When you click the Done or Submit button, then the survey response will be submitted.

Appendix B
Observation Notes Form

Observation notes form ---

date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

Duration of observation: _____

Focus of observation: the practice of reading aloud

Title of book read:

Objective actual observations:

Some components to look for:

- * text selection
- * text previewed & practiced?
- * clear purpose established?
- * fluent reading modeled?
- * animation & expression?
- * text talk? Before? During? After?
- * listener engagement?
- * reader's evident interest in chosen text?
- * making connections to other reading or writing?

Thoughts, analysis, reflections, questions:

Appendix C
Survey Cover Letter

Date

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. For my thesis study, I am examining the practice of teachers reading aloud to students. Since you are experienced teachers that know a lot about this practice, I am inviting you to participate in my research study by completing a *Survey Monkey* survey, which I have created.

My survey will take about ten minutes or less to complete. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name. Copies of my thesis study will be provided to the University of Alaska. If you choose to participate in my survey, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible and return the completed survey within two weeks.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational research. The data collected will help provide useful information regarding the practice of reading aloud in classrooms. If you would like a summary of this study, please complete and detach the

Request for Information form and return to me. If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me.

Thank you again for considering my invitation to you to participate in my survey.

Sincerely,

John

John Bost

907-457-1629 (Ext. 262)

john.bost@k12northstar.org

P.S. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or [1-866-876-7800](tel:1-866-876-7800) (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area) or fyirb@uaf.edu.

Dr. Maureen Hogan

907-474-7341

mphogan@alaska.edu

Request for Information

Please send a summary of the survey results to the address listed below.

Name:

Address:

Appendix D

Parental Consent Form for Your Child to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Parents,

Under the supervision of Dr. Maureen Hogan, Professor of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), John Bost, elementary school teacher and graduate student at UAF, is conducting research on the practice of teachers reading aloud to students. The purpose of this study is to learn how different elementary school teachers read aloud to students. There will be no audio or videotaping. Mr. Bost will just take some notes of what he sees while the class listens to a story.

If you agree for your child to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- 1) Your child, along with the rest of his/her class, will be observed once as the classroom teacher reads to students during a class read-aloud time.
- 2) The researcher will observe your child's class once for about 30 minutes or less, during the spring or fall of 2013.
- 3) There will be no consequences if your child chooses not to participate. Your child could sit just to the side of the class temporarily, and still listen to the story. Your child could also visit the school library instead.
- 4) The information gathered from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Your child's name will not be used in any notes or in the report and any identifying personal information will be avoided.

- 5) There are no benefits to your child's participation, aside from enjoying the read-aloud story.
- 6) There are no costs to your child if they choose to participate in this study.
- 7) If you have any questions, please contact John Bost at 907-457-1629 (Ext. 262) or you can write to him at P.O. Box 82082 Fairbanks, AK 99708. You also may contact Dr. Hogan, Professor of Education at UAF, at 907-474-7341.

Consent:

I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participation in research study is voluntary. My child is free to decline to participate in this research study, or I may withdraw their participation at any point without penalty. Their decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on their present or future status at Weller Elementary School.

My child _____ has my consent to participate in the Educational research study about reading aloud.

Student is a minor _____
(age)

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date:

(signature)

Appendix E

Informed Consent

The Practice of Teachers Reading Aloud in the Classroom

Principal Investigator:

John Bost

Graduate student

School of Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks

P.O. Box 82082

Fairbanks, AK 99708

907-460-1689

john.bost@k12northstar.org

Background:

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers view reading aloud to students and learn how they put their beliefs into practice.

Study procedure:

Your expected time commitment for this study is about 30 minutes.

Procedure: You and your class will be observed, by the researcher, as you read aloud to your students during one of your regular classroom read-aloud times. The researcher will try to be as unobtrusive as possible during the read-aloud.

Risks:

The risks of this study are minimal. These risks are similar to those you experience when disclosing work-related information to others. You may decline to participate in the observation and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

Benefits:

There are no benefits to you for your participation in this study. However, it is hoped that the information obtained from this study may be of interest to you. You may find of interest how some of your teacher colleagues view reading aloud and what transpires during their practice of reading aloud to students.

Alternative Procedures:

If you do not want to be in this study, you may choose not to participate.

February 12, 2013

Informed Consent

The Practice of Teachers Reading Aloud in the Classroom

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

- ∞ Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used for all researcher notes and documents.
- ∞ Notes and transcribed notes and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a secure file in the personal possession of the researcher. When no longer necessary for research, all materials will be destroyed.
- ∞ Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publication that may result from this study. All participants involved in this study will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

Person To Contact:

Should you have any questions about the research or any related matters, please contact the researcher at john.bost@k12northstar.org or 907-460-1689.

Institutional Review Board:

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if problems arise which you feel you cannot discuss with the Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at <http://www.uaf.edu/irb/contact-us/>. Please see this web site for phone numbers of IRB Members.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher.

Unforeseeable Risks:

There may be risks that are not anticipated. However every effort will be made to minimize any risks.

Costs To Subject:

There are no costs for your participation in this study.

Compensation:

There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

February 12, 2013

Informed Consent

The Practice of Teachers Reading Aloud in the Classroom

Consent:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

School District Approval



FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

520 Fifth Avenue Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-4756 (907) 452-2000
www.northstar.k12.ak.us



March 28, 2013

John Bost
PO Box 82082
Fairbanks, AK 99708

Dear Mr. Bost:

This letter is written to officially inform you that your application to conduct research in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District has been reviewed and approved. This approval assumes that you will follow all regulations governing research projects as set forth in the administrative regulation that you received with your application.

Approval at this stage in no way obligates the schools to participate in the research study. Any principal may refuse any research project to be conducted in the school except for those mandated by the Superintendent or School Board. Your next step will be to contact the principal at each of the schools before distributing the surveys.

If you have any questions, please call the Research & Accountability Department at 452-2000 ext. 11340. When your project is complete, please send a copy of the results to the Research & Accountability Department. I wish you good luck with your research and will be very interested in the outcome.

Sincerely,


Kathy Hughes
Executive Director, Alternative Instruction & Accountability

cc: Lynn Weckesser, Principal, Weller Elementary School

Appendix G

IRB Approval



(907) 474-7800
(907) 474-5444 fax
fyirb@uaf.edu
www.uaf.edu/irb

Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

May 2, 2013

To: Maureen Hogan, PhD
Principal Investigator
From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB
Re: [438528-2] The Practice of Teachers Reading Aloud to Students

Thank you for submitting the Amendment/Modification referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	The Practice of Teachers Reading Aloud to Students
Received:	April 4, 2013
Expedited Category:	7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	May 2, 2013
Expiration Date:	May 2, 2014

This action is included on the June 12, 2013 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.